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**RE-IMAGINING THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY:
MYTH, METAPHOR, AND NARRATIVE IN
NATIONAL SECURITY**

by

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MYTH, METAPHOR, AND NARRATIVE IN
NATIONAL SECURITY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

In 2011, two defense strategists premiered their argument for a new national strategic narrative. Geared toward national security but intended to guide policymaking across government, this narrative has yet to receive official endorsement by the Defense Department or at the executive level. This thesis will explore if/why a new narrative is necessary, using an interdisciplinary historical and analytic approach. Consulting scholarship from ecology, sociology, economics, chaos theory, cybernetics, and other fields, the author will attempt to elucidate unobvious shifts occurring at multiple levels of the U.S. strategic realm. Shifting paradigms provide a good lens through which to view the narrative fragmentation that has arguably rendered much of U.S. strategy and policymaking ineffective over the last two decades. Ultimately, the author will argue that the U.S. government (and population) would reap long-term security and prosperity benefits from a revamped overall national strategic narrative to guide whole-of-government strategy in the coming decades.

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teaching theory and practice. I owe gratitude to all of my NPS professors, whose assignments allowed me to think critically and form my thinking on the issues discussed herein. Among my many mentors, Dr. John Arquilla remains the most enigmatic out of sheer brilliance. Our shared love of William Gibson novels and *Battlestar Galactica* were early evidence of our shared wavelength, and I have benefitted greatly from his critique and encouragement of my work, not to mention his introductory course on information operations, which should be required for all students at NPS regardless of curriculum. At NPS, I also had the distinct privilege of serving as Dr. Nancy Roberts's research assistant. Our shared journey exploring wicked problems, design thinking, public institutions and large-scale social/technological change has had an immeasurable impact on my intellectual trajectory. I owe her a fundamental debt of gratitude for serving as my thesis advisor; her seasoned wisdom from the front lines of change creation and intimate knowledge of public policy were instrumental in narrowing my focus and keeping me grounded in the present. Though the ensuing text will no doubt anyway appear a sad stab at a theory of everything, it is thanks to Dr. Roberts that my historical focus is closer to 500 rather than 5 million years (and I mean that quite literally). I am nonetheless compelled to thank Dr. Severin Fowles, professor of anthropology at Barnard College, for encouraging my "evolutionary" leanings. His guidance as my undergraduate thesis advisor was never far from my mind while penning the following text. Daniel Quinn has it right in *Ishmael*: the fundamental assumption at the basis of all that we do in Western civilization is a narrative of human dominance; from the agricultural revolution forward, our technological and social path has been a basic drive to consume the resources of our planet (which, while it has throughout history masqueraded as a drive to build a thriving society, is an assumption that is toxic to our planet). Thus, many of our science fiction authors (better predictors of the long-term future than any market analyst) envision a future where we have rendered the planet uninhabitable. It is not too late to change our course, and if nothing else, the following work is meant to join the growing body of calls to action to transcend

institutional constraints by changing our worldview. The necessary change will not come *from* institutions, it will come *to* them, on a wave of paradigmatic shift driven first by technology, and then by social change.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

It is widely recognized that the next 50–100 years will bring revolutionary, if not cataclysmic, change to the human species. The pace of technological and social change demands the invention of new vocabularies to describe an evolving understanding of the universe and our place within it. The scientific method championed by the Enlightenment successfully divided realms of human inquiry and enterprise into distinct disciplines, and has brought much knowledge. The “information glut” we now face, however, requires convergence, not further compartmentalization. The task of the scientific enlightenment was previously to discover the way the world worked, and more recently has been to unify these discoveries into understanding. Soon, the task will be to create reality itself. Amid this pervasive sense of change and abundance of information, gaining situational awareness is a central task. We are in a period of rapid paradigm shift, in which conflicting narratives are vying for dominance in the expression of national identity and foreign policy. This dynamic makes decision making, policy making, defense planning, and problem solving highly problematic at multiple levels because it is unclear how problems can be framed productively. Without reconceptualizing national identity and national security in pursuit of a constructive framework and a common narrative, it is unlikely we will be able to formulate good policy, nor sustain American peace and prosperity.

My hypothesis is simple: to survive (as a species, not just a nation), we must change the way we live (that is, adapt). To adapt, we must change the way we think. To change the way we think, we must reconceptualize ourselves. This process will take place with or without governments around the world. It is already in motion; the pace of technological progress alone promises to redefine cultural norms and blur the neat lines we have drawn around nations and even the “human species.” As the technology is still developing, the shape that these revolutions will take is not clear; however, a pervasive sense of change is afoot—

the Open Government Initiative at the State Department, the piecemeal attempts at “transformation” within the Department of Defense, these are not just signs of a new generation entering public service and wanting to shake things up. The factors that go into national security decision-making are changing. These are attempts to adapt to the technological and social revolutions we know are coming quickly. This thesis will approach the present international context of complexity and uncertainty from the standpoint of a young digital native, frustrated by a lack of public progress (and a bloat of public process), asking the question, “Where are we headed as a country, and how can we reach a consensus about where we *should be* headed as a country?” This is a story about competing narratives, a story about a fragmentation of the concept of “the common good,” a story that finds us unsure of ourselves as a nation.

This is not a story about grand strategy, though strategic thought and planning have played into every thread of the American narrative and are often its most visible representation. Grand strategies serve as very visible, explicit and directed efforts to impact the American narrative. The containment of communism, for example, formed the basis of American grand strategy for a large part of the 20th century, and necessitated the construction of the American national security state: the bureaucratic structures and processes that have cemented the country on a near-constant wartime footing since the end of WWII. Over time, this militarism has come to largely define the American approach to foreign policy, and in depriving us of an enemy/antagonist, the collapse of the Soviet Union left the United States with a threat vacuum—a gaping hole in our narrative. Another way to frame the major questions driving this thesis might be: how will the American narrative of the recent past and present be viewed in the future? Are we telling a story about ourselves that will lead us to a future in which we enjoy the same (or better) level of prosperity and the same level of influence in the world? What options do we have for selecting a course, and does it fit with the world we face and the world we want to be facing? By asking questions about

where our narrative has been and where it is headed, this thesis will attempt to reframe contentious issues in potentially more productive and less divisive ways.

Two decades after the end of the Cold War and a decade on in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States finds itself lacking a grand strategy to replace the Cold War mandate. This absence of a fundamental guiding strategy in spite of a militarized foreign policy contributes to narrative fragmentation, which convolutes the task of policy-making and leaves gaps in the way many Americans conceptualize their country: are we a state or an empire; a helping hand or a hegemon; a superpower or a struggling behemoth? In the defense community, this lack of grand strategy can be found in our struggles in the Middle East under the umbrella of the “War on Terror”—most notably in these conflicts’ shared basic lack of political purpose or endgame. Terrorism has, in many senses, replaced Communism as “the threat.” However, in failing to adapt our structures and processes to changing threats, we leave ourselves unable to defend against any of them. Thus, this lack of grand strategy—perhaps better imagined as fundamental incoherence in the story we tell about ourselves (our narrative)—is in itself a threat to national security. As I will argue, a dearth of guiding political and military strategy is not the only—or even the most important—threat to national security associated with narrative fragmentation. However, it is the one most closely associated with the current conceptualization of “national security.” This concept is importantly in flux; though it connotes military answers to military questions, the issue of securing the nation is much broader than armed conflict.

In 2011, two defense strategists premiered their argument for a new national strategic narrative. Geared toward national security but intended to guide policymaking across government, this narrative has yet to receive official endorsement by the Defense Department or at the executive level. Importantly, this new directed narrative contribution recognizes that national security is a mandate much broader than the military. This thesis will explore if/why a new narrative is necessary, using an interdisciplinary historical and analytic approach.

While at times necessarily reductionist or provocative, this approach is meant to reimagine the American nation and its place in a rapidly transforming world. Shifting paradigms provide a good lens through which to view the narrative fragmentation that has arguably rendered much of U.S. strategy and policymaking ineffective over the last two decades. Consulting scholarship from ecology, sociology, economics, chaos theory, cybernetics, and other fields, the author will attempt to elucidate unobvious shifts occurring at multiple levels of the U.S. strategic realm. I will identify what our narratives have been and the options we have for the future, in order to form a better view of the “big picture” of American national security.

B. IMPORTANCE

The complexity of the post-Cold War international system has exploded into Technicolor, and gaining situational awareness has become an important, if not often explicitly discussed, directive. Meanwhile, we are engaged in a “Global War on Terror” whose purpose and endgame have never been clear, but whose existence is arguably a direct result of the struggle to craft relevant strategy in lieu of a containable threat. Arguably, neither engagement has made the world safer from extremism; unlike communism, its ideological strategic predecessor, violent extremism (“terrorism”) is only strengthened by the establishment’s reaction to it. Understanding the complexity of the global environment requires a systemic perspective, and today’s systems are much more complex than the bipolar world of communism vs. capitalism. Pervading all of this empirical reality is a persistent impetus toward *change*, and yet our public sector is stuck. I will argue that though it is not the common way to frame the issue, this change/inertia paradox in government is a result of competing narratives in American society that are mutually exclusive. Change *will* occur (major technological revolutions are already in motion), but unless we adapt our governance structures to changing realities, our hard-won liberties, checks and balances—so central to our national self-conception—will be left behind by a power elite that no longer requires political legitimacy for technical and social

control. To adapt, we must come to some consensus on our national story, which will require revisiting who we have been, in order to decide who we want to become.

Signs of strategic fragmentation abound at the government level. In the post-Cold War world, we have continued the broad international mandate of democracy promotion, though politics at home increasingly appear to be a contest to govern rather than a meaningful debate about governance. Thirteen years ago, we reacted to a criminal terrorist attack with the invasion of a state and a “global war” on a tactic. The constant undercurrent of fear surrounding cyber, biological, chemical, and nuclear warfare seems to threaten surprise attack on the homeland on a daily basis, while we struggle to update doctrines of deterrence and coercion to deal with the rise of non-state actors and the difficulties of waging war against a network. Having identified energy and environmental issues as security threats, America’s bureaucratic structures are struggling to incorporate sustainable ideals into militarized processes. These are but a few examples of the complexity inherent in the national security environment, and it is thus not altogether surprising that we lack a grand strategy twenty years after the fall of the Soviet Union.

In 2011, the White House published multiple strategy documents attempting to address some of these issues, including strategies to combat violent extremism in its many forms.^{1,2} Meanwhile, two high-level defense analysts have promulgated a proposal for a new American grand strategy in the form of a “national strategic narrative.”³ This thesis will intimately tie into these timely signals of change by examining the fundamental myths and metaphors

¹ The White House, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, Executive Office of the President (Washington DC: Government Printing Office), http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf.

² The White House, *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, Executive Office of the President (Washington DC: Government Printing Office), http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf.

³ Wayne Porter and Mark “Puck” Mykleby (“Mr. Y”), “A National Strategic Narrative (With preface by Anne-Marie Slaughter),” *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 2011, 2-13. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf>.

that guide us as a nation in order to raise questions about our future national narrative (the story we tell ourselves about ourselves) and about our conceptualization of our national security. Hopefully, this effort to reframe the national security narrative will add to a growing body of literature that aims to bridge the gap between our current planning and decision-making structures, and the dynamic reality of a rapidly changing world. As a civilian in a military institution, I hope to bridge gaps and raise questions in a fresh way.

II. BACKGROUND

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

Broadly conceived, a national narrative is the story we as a country tell ourselves about ourselves. Sometimes, “narrative” aligns with “worldview” or “grand strategy,” though this is not necessarily the case. Narratives are derived from history, myth, culture, policy, strategy, and story. Narratives can be thought of as grand themes in our national story, and defining “a narrative” depends of level of analysis. My thesis will review primary and analytical sources (some of them in narrative format) to extrapolate American narratives. One way to differentiate is to consider narratives as either emergent or directed. Directed narratives are top-down, intentionally crafted stories that aim to guide policy-making and create consensus by weaving a good tale.¹ The 1947 *Foreign Policy* article written by “Mr. X” (aka George Kennan), which crafted the policy of “containment,” is a good example.² Emergent narratives, on the other hand, are macro cultural productions, most easily identifiable in retrospect in our characterizations of eras: “the swingin’ 60s,” “the British colonial era,” “the Cold War,” etc.

Perhaps the earliest example of a major emergent American national narrative is democratism, whose ideals are nicely embodied by the Declaration of Independence. My thesis will use these emergent narratives as an organizational format, beginning with democratism; from directed narratives of founding fathers, proceeding through the formative 19th century and on to the 20th; to the prescient analysis of Alexis de Tocqueville,³ which will be almost eerily instructive. There is never *one* cohesive national narrative (in fact, too much cohesion in a national narrative can be a major warning sign, i.e., the Third Reich), though certain

¹ David Barry, “Strategy Retold: Towards a Narrative View of Strategic Discourse,” *Academy of Management Review*, 22, no.2 (1997): 434.

² George “X” Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947.

³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1863).

evocative speeches, letters, or stories can come to be representative of an era in national thinking, and grand narrative themes can be traced in their overlap and waxing/waning influence throughout American history.¹

I will pay closest attention to artifacts, analyses and moments that have had the biggest impact on American conceptualizations of national security, whether be it the Monroe Doctrine or the containment doctrine created by Mr. X.² All of these individual artifacts will be useful in assessing the underlying foundational myths and common metaphors that we use to conceptualize our place in the world, and in extrapolating major national narratives. While not narratives themselves, certain analyses will be instructive in learning how narrative production has influenced our national structures and systems.^{3,4} Certain scholars have advanced ideas explicitly meant to be adapted into national narratives; those perhaps most immediately relevant to the current inquiry are those that have erupted since the close of the Cold War: both Fukuyama⁵ and Huntington⁶ contributed seminal narratives that have greatly impacted the contemporary concept of national security and the policies of the past two decades. The most recent narrative contribution I will analyze is an outcome of the Department of Defense at the highest levels, though it lacks official political approval. This “National Strategic Narrative” seeks to redress the lack of American grand strategy in the post-Cold War period by reorienting strategy around the concept of sustainability.⁷

¹ James V. Wertsch, "Collective Memory and Narrative Templates," *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008).

² George "X" Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947.

³ Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law That Transformed America* (City, state: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁴ David C Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001).

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

⁷ Wayne Porter and Puck Mykleby, *A National Strategic Narrative* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011).

National narratives are a cultural production, often implicit or extrapolated from individual sources; grand strategy, while often dealing with the same issues, is an explicit political production. While the Obama administration has produced several strategy documents, countless analysts have observed the lack of an overarching grand strategy since the Cold War. I survey analysis of Cold War strategy⁸⁹ and its failures,¹⁰ post-Cold War strategy^{11,12,13} (or lack thereof),¹⁴ post-9/11 strategy,^{15,16,17,18} and analysis of strategy itself.^{19,20,21} Central to the creation of grand strategy and narratives on national security are conceptualizations of the threat we face. The focus of most of our national security apparatus currently is terrorism. I will thus analyze terrorism from

⁸ Arthur Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 22-52.

⁹ Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

¹¹ Robert J. Art, "A Defensible Defense: America's Grand Strategy After the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no. 4 (1991): 10,

¹² Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996): 5-53.

¹³ Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *International Security* 21, no. 4 (1997): 49-88.

¹⁴ Robert E. Hunter, *A New Grand Strategy for the United States*, Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee (RAND Corporation, 2008).
<http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT313.html>.

¹⁵ Stephen D Biddle, *American Grand Strategy After 9/11: An Assessment*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College (U.S. Army War College, 2005).

¹⁶ Michael J Boyle, "The war on terror in American grand strategy," *International Affairs* 84, no. 2 (2008): 191-209.

¹⁷ The White House, *National Security Strategy*, Executive Office of the President (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2010).

¹⁸ Lukas Milevski, "A Collective Failure of Grand Strategy: The West's Unintended Wars of Choice," *The RUSI Journal* 156, no. 1 (2011): 30-33.

¹⁹ B.H. Liddell-Hart, *Strategy* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1967).

²⁰ John C. Camillus, "Strategy as a Wicked Problem," *Harvard Business Review*, May 2008: 99-106.

²¹ Daniel W. Drezner, "Values, Interests, and American Grand Strategy," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (2005): 423-432.

philosophical²² and empirical²³ perspectives in order to assess whether we are framing the issue constructively.²⁴

Even more fundamental than outside threats, however, to concepts of national security, are concepts of national identity. Without an understanding of who we have been, who we are, and who we want to become, there can be no hope for a concept of “common good,” let alone a cohesive narrative. Unlike my review of national narratives, which are stories we tell about America, my review of perspectives on American national identity will focus on stories that have been told about Americans. Though not entirely externally conferred, national identity can be viewed most cohesively from the outside. From *Democracy in America*,²⁵ to *The Ugly American*²⁶ and beyond,²⁷ observers of American policy, culture and society can serve as a valuable barometer on international public opinion.²⁸ In conjunction with Benedict Anderson’s theoretical basis of the imagined community,²⁹ such analyses will be useful when considering America’s global role and internal stability.³⁰

Specific aspects of American society, such as civil society,³¹ are especially relevant to questions about the American community. The debate on

²² Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," *Le Monde*, November 2, 2001.

²³ John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2007).

²⁴ Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002).

²⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1863).

²⁶ Eugene Burdick and William J. Lederer, *The Ugly American* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958).

²⁷ Bernard Henri Lévy, *American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville* (New York: Random House, 2007).

²⁸ Tony Judt and Denis Lacorne, *With us or Against Us: Studies in Global Anti-Americanism* (New York: MacMillan, 2007).

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1993).

³⁰ Juan Enriquez, *The Untied States of America: Polarization, Fracturing, and Our Future* (New York: Crown, 2005).

³¹ Daniel Posner, "Civil Society and the Reconstruction of Failed States," in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, 237-255 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

the health of American civil society heated up in the mid-1990s,³² and has been refined and augmented by the ongoing information revolution,³³ whose communication technologies³⁴ promise to revolutionize civil society itself.³⁵ Civil society is not the same as civic participation, though this is another barometer on national strength. Visible here are further signs of fragmentation: Americans' approval of political leaders is extremely low, while voter turnout remains relatively low and the two-party system is increasingly accused of being inherently tyrannical.³⁶ None of this is necessarily new, though it has taken on new form in the digital age. The media, long the arbiter of civic debate and creator of the "public interest," instead now serves the interests of its shareholders, an increasingly concentrated conglomerate interested in subdividing its audience into communities of *consumers*, rather than citizen-communities.³⁷ Another aspect of American society considered important to national security and foundational to national identity is the so-called "health of the middle class."³⁸ Growing income inequality and the costs of education and owning a home, among other factors, have led some to propose an underlying shift in the possibility of the American dream.³⁹

³² Robert Putnam, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

³³ Felicia Wu Song, *Virtual Communities: Bowling Alone, Online Together* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

³⁴ Tim Berners-Lee, "Long Live the Web: A Call for Continued Open Standards and Neutrality," *Scientific American*, November 22, 2010.

³⁵ Kevin Kelly, "The New Socialism: Global Collectivist Society is Coming Online," *Wired Magazine*, May 22, 2009; Harry Hochheiser and Ben Shneiderman, "From Bowling Alone to Tweeting Together: Technology Mediated Social Participation," *Interactions*, March/April 2010.

³⁶ Robert B Reich, "The Lost Art of Democratic Narrative," *The New Republic*, March 28, 2005.

³⁷ Ted Koppel, "Olbermann, O'Reilly and the death of real news," *The Washington Post*, November 14, 2010.

³⁸ Elizabeth Warren, "The New Economy and the Unraveling Social Safety Net: The Growing Threat to Middle Class Families," *Brooklyn Law Review* 69, no. 401 (2004).

³⁹ Lou Dobbs, *War on the Middle Class: How the Government, Big Business, and Special Interest Groups Are Waging War on the American Dream and How to Fight Back* (Viking Adult, 2006).

Underlying the often-disparate findings of the literature reviewed here is a profound sense of fragmentation within the American sociopolitical system. Getting a perspective on the social, financial, and political systems that determine American strategy, define American security, and constrain policy options will be the project of this thesis, while its goal will be to assess how we may be able to adapt to changing circumstances. Many have theorized that we need revolutionary change,⁴⁰ though fewer have suggested what form it might take, and still fewer seem to understand how we might make it happen within the current system.⁴¹ The science of complexity,⁴²⁴³ however, may imply some interventions yet to be tried, while the developing school of design theory⁴⁴⁴⁵ offers new perspectives on old policy problems, and new technologies may offer new promise for change creation.⁴⁶

B. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

Any examination of myth, metaphor and narrative necessitates a certain level of abstraction that may be atypical in a military setting. However, certain theoretical constructs will be implicated, and these will help to structure my inquiry. Perhaps the first of these is the concept of narrative itself. I will argue that words matter, and that the metaphors we use in sensemaking are foundational to

⁴⁰ Paul K. Davis and Peter A. Wilson, *Looming Discontinuities in U.S. Military Strategy and Defense Planning: Colliding RMAs Necessitate a New Strategy*, Report for OSD, National Defense Research Institute, RAND Corporation (RAND, 2011).

⁴¹ Robert M. Gates, "A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs* 88 (2009).

⁴² Markus Schwaninger, "Complex versus complicated: the how of coping with complexity," *Kybernetes* 38, no. 1/2 (2009): 89-92.

⁴³ David S. Alberts and Thomas J. Czerwinski, *Complexity, Global Politics, and National Security* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1997).

⁴⁴ Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues* 8, no. 2 (1992): 5-21.

⁴⁵ Matthijs Hisschemöller and Rob Hoppe, "Coping with intractable controversies: The case for problem structuring in policy design and analysis," *Knowledge, Technology & Policy* 8, no. 4 (1995): 40-60.

⁴⁶ Beth Simone-Noveck, *Wiki Government: How Technology Can Make Government Better, Democracy Stronger, and Citizens More Powerful* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

our strategies and thus our policies. This narrative perspective calls upon our fundamental national myths and the famous words (whether spoken by Jefferson, Lincoln, Tocqueville or Martin Luther King Jr.) that form the basis of shared national memory. Perhaps the most well known hypothesis on this issue is Benedict Anderson's *imagined community*,⁴⁷ which will provide a framework through which to explore these issues.

Another theoretical construct central to my inquiry is Thomas Kuhn's concept of *paradigm shift*, which comes from his seminal 1962 work "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions."⁴⁸ The concept of paradigm importantly highlights both the revolutionary (rather than linear) pattern of history, and also serves as an important reminder of the human tendency toward myopia; the tendency to believe that history is a story of linear progress and that our current frame of reference (i.e., understanding of reality) represents the only rational worldview. A classic series of paradigm shifts is the transition to a Copernican reality in which the Earth was no longer the center of the universe, to a Newtonian worldview in which we saw ourselves as a cog in the dependable machine of nature, to the (still developing) Quantum worldview in which reality itself is called into question, as matter in its smallest, most basic form is newly understood to be a probability more than an actuality. These scientific revolutions may not have obvious application to national security; however, my thesis will demonstrate why the concept of paradigm shift is so important to the design of relevant and functional strategy and policy under conditions of uncertainty.

Further refining and driving these shifts in our understanding of physics—and thus reality—has been the discovery of fractal geometry, which explains how simple inputs and initial conditions can produce unimaginable complexity. A paradigm shift in itself, fractal geometry gave birth to another theoretical construct that is fundamental to the project of my thesis. *Complexity theory* is a

⁴⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁴⁸ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

developing body of inquiry that seeks to combine our scientific understanding of fractal geometry, ecological balance, and biological evolution into a theory of complex adaptive systems.⁴⁹ We know that organizations and institutions take on a “life of their own,” and complexity theory helps us explain why and how our systems adapt (or fail to adapt) to changing circumstances, which has obvious applications for policy planning and the design of more efficient systems.

Another construct relevant to my inquiry is Rittel and Weber’s concept of *wicked problems*.⁵⁰ This is a class of issues we typically label “problems,” but are never able to solve. Problematically, this label tends to imply a “solution,” since our typical intervention is “problem solving.” The concept of wicked problems importantly distinguishes between problems that are soluble in the Newtonian sense: a linear scientific method should produce a solution; versus problems that are so complex, that any attempt to frame or define the problem either alters it or assumes a solution, and whose “solutions” should be called “interventions” because they cannot promise to solve anything at all, only to cause an effect which may be gauged better or worse than previous outcomes. Many public policy problems are thus “wicked problems,” and this distinction will be instructive to my thesis. Coping with public wicked problems invites a design approach, as opposed to a problem solving or planning approach. The developing field of literature on “*design thinking*” and design methodology⁵¹ will importantly inform my approach.⁵²

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of the theoretical constructs employed herein, I believe it covers those most fundamental to my inquiry. Though the above list of constructs may seem disparate, they are unified by out-

⁴⁹ James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

⁵⁰ J.W.J. Rittel and M.M. Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973): 155-173.

⁵¹ Harold G. Nelson and Erik Stolterman, *The Design Way: Intentional Change in an Unpredictable World* (Englewood: Educational Technology Publications, 2002).

⁵² Australian Public Service Commission, *Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective*, Australian Public Service (Australian Government, 2007).

of-the-box thinking and their applicability to the unknowable future. Most generally, my inquiry focuses on the broadening mandate of “national security,” which is arguably morphing into “human security.” Specific to national security, I conclude that terrorism is a symptom of the international order, rather than a threat against it. Thus, the threat is systemic and our attempts to combat it may have us invested in the wrong interventions. A broader (and perhaps more pressing) security threat is made up of ecological concerns, including the fundamental unsustainability of our foundational myth of abundance, and our ongoing dependence on fossil fuels in spite of the existence of technology enabling us to move past it. Further, I argue that the explosion in complexity (and resulting lack of situational awareness at the highest levels) since the end of the Cold War has led to narrative fragmentation in the United States, a wicked problem in itself with symptoms to be found almost everywhere you look: from the rapidly changing media landscape, to periodic debates in Congress over whether or not to financially ruin the country, to pervasive national debate on immigration reform in a country that has historically seen itself as a “melting pot.” Beyond concluding that complexity begets complexity, I sketch some possible routes forward; my audience is the national security state itself, and I aim to prescribe truth to power in order to foment the seeds of positive change.

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III. OVERVIEW

A. METHODS AND SOURCES

This thesis primarily utilizes an interdisciplinary historical analytic approach, with methodological and epistemological elements taken from anthropology, complexity theory, and systemics/cybernetics. Typically, narratives that come to define a political or strategic era are not comprised of one speech/book/story; narratives must be extrapolated from cultural production, which is a necessarily subjective process, but which calls upon fundamental myths and movements, as well as generally-agreed-upon interpretations of history (importantly, that which is taught to youth here and abroad), to inform analysis. Of course, any individual perspective on narrative is by definition biased; the project requires the selection of certain “facts,” perspectives, and historical artifacts (and thus the omission of others)—this is done in order to question and provoke thought. The approach is also necessarily reductive. As a cultural production, most in focus when in retrospect (but palpable in the present as the “gestalt”), national narrative is a big picture question. The reader may (and should) take issue with aspects of the arguments herein: this is by design.

Primary source materials include historically significant speeches and influential policy papers from throughout American history, culturally important movies and works of fiction, as well as a personal conversation with Captain Wayne Porter (co-author of the “National Strategic Narrative”). Secondary sources range from scholarly journal articles that analyze American foreign policy and internal dynamics, to nonfiction opinion books that largely do the same with a more varied amount of bias. Where issues are contentious, effort has been made to consult source material representing both conservative and progressive viewpoints, though my analysis may often imply that history is always on the side of progress (however “progress” is defined). In my attempt to gain situational awareness in complexity, I will apply this historical analytic lens to both the past and the present, though the history books have not (in many cases) yet been

written. And while I cannot hope to be exhaustive in my historical review, this inherently reductionist approach importantly mirrors the task of sensemaking in the age of “big data,” seeking opportunities for powerful and sustainable narrative to emerge from fragmentation.

I have drawn heavily on emerging disciplines from design theory⁵³ to critical cyber and media studies,⁵⁴ and some of my source material is specifically focused on disciplinary development. I intentionally sought out this material to attempt to develop a holistic intellectual perspective on a forest I live smack dab in the middle of. In anthropology this sort of inquiry is called “studying sideways,” and while it avoids some of the cultural relativism issues of more outwardly focused studies, the researcher must also be on constant watch for being lost in her own frame of reference. I credit the small anthropological discipline of science studies, and most notably Bruno Latour, for first taking me fully outside of the box of “modern reality.”⁵⁵ Latour’s revolutionary concepts on our fictitious-yet-fundamental dichotomy between nature and society were as foundational to my undergraduate thesis on biotechnology as they have been here. His book *We Have Never Been Modern*, along with Daniel Quinn’s *Ishmael*,⁵⁶ are together wholly responsible for my optimism that a more functional relationship to the planet is possible for humanity; it is the path from here to there that remains occluded.

B. SUMMARY

While spanning a broad range of security issues and utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis will proceed along a basically chronological

⁵³ Harold G. Nelson and Erik Stolterman, *The Design Way: Intentional Change in an Unpredictable World* (Englewood: Educational Technology Publications, 2002).

⁵⁴ Robert Hassan and Julian Thomas, *The New Media Theory Reader* (Columbus, OH: McGraw Hill International, 2006).

⁵⁵ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 103.

⁵⁶ Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 117.

organizational format. The project of the thesis will be to describe the evolution of the American national narrative (itself woven from multiple narratives), from our roots as a revolutionary republic, through the tension and tumult of the 19th century, to the foundational early 20th century and the creation of the national security state, through the Cold War, up to the present. The approach is driven by an understanding that *narrative fragmentation* contributes to policy stagnation and creates conditions under which decision-making is extremely problematic, and is undertaken in an effort to ask questions about where we are headed as a nation, and whether there might be a way to encourage cohesion in that process from the top down.

Rather than analyzing history according to finite periods of time (i.e., by century), this thesis will (somewhat subjectively) characterize these time periods in terms of narrative themes vying for dominance. This approach will enable organization along the ebb and flow of significant narratives. For example, we will see the dominance of the democratic narrative become subsumed by the impetus of expansion during the 19th century. However, tracing the broader evolution of these narratives will span centuries. Chapter four will explore dominant narratives throughout American history, beginning with “the democratic narrative,” the American experiment that is foundational to our national myths and the spirit of American exceptionalism. I survey “the expansionist narrative,” born out of the same attitudes, which mandated the global spread of American ideals. We will next see these threads coalesce into “the war narrative,” in which militarism becomes characteristic of American foreign policy. Though much of the driving impetus for the war narrative ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this narrative is importantly still ongoing, in the absence of a compelling and cohesive successor. Chapter five will survey contemporary competing narratives, vying for dominance in politics and social expression within a rapidly changing and fragmented world. In any balanced complex adaptive system, the (policy) pendulum swings, and resistance to change is natural and indeed necessary. However, the trajectory and progression of change is the focus here. Finally,

chapter six will suggest narrative and strategic directionality, providing fodder for future planning. Throughout, this narrative evolution will be analyzed along the framework of paradigm shift: the idea that history proceeds in revolutionary bursts (which are getting closer and closer together) will be foundational to an argument that to achieve real and sustainable national security, revolutionary transformation in the vision and goals of our system will be necessary.

As Bruno Latour foresees (all emphasis mine):

Instead of two powers, one hidden and indisputable (nature), and the other disputable and despised (politics), we will have two different tasks in the same collective. The first task will be to answer the question: **How many humans and nonhumans are to be taken into account?** The second will be to answer the most difficult of all questions: **Are you ready, and at the price of what sacrifice, to live the good life together?** That this highest of political and moral questions could have been raised, for so many centuries, by so many bright minds, for humans only without the nonhumans that make them up, will soon appear, I have no doubt, as extravagant as when the Founding Fathers denied slaves and women the vote...There is a future, and it does differ from the past. But where once it was a matter of hundreds and thousands, now millions and billions have to be accommodated—billions of people, of course, but also billions of animals, stars, prions, cows, robots, chips, and bytes...That there was a decade when people could believe that history had drawn to a close simply because an ethnocentric—or better yet, epistemocentric—conception of progress had drawn a closing parenthesis will appear as the greatest and let us hope last outburst of an exotic cult of modernity that has never been short on arrogance.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 296-299.

IV. NARRATIVES OF AMERICAN HISTORY

A. THE DEMOCRATIC NARRATIVE

The democratic narrative is perhaps the most recognizable in American history; it is the story we teach our children and the image we hope to project abroad. From the start, the narrative of American democracy has been a story about the role of a government in the lives of its citizens, about the tradeoffs negotiated in that contract: liberty versus security, individualism versus equality, privacy versus collectivism. A certain amount of hypocrisy is baked into this narrative; “We the people,” begins the U.S. Constitution, a foundational document of both the narrative and its practice, and yet from the beginning the system favored white male landowners over other people.

It is a story forged in great debates that were never truly settled. Within the democratic narrative, the founding fathers’ philosophical discourse on federalism versus republicanism foreshadowed ongoing debates regarding states’ rights as members of the union. Far from settled, in fact, states including Hawaii and Texas both contain secessionist movements to this day.⁵⁸ The debate and Civil War over the “dirty compromise” of slavery, meanwhile, set the stage for seemingly intractable racial inequality and tension. But the same debates that have caused fracture throughout American history are central to the narrative of democracy: in deriving its power from people, the government must adapt to shifting conceptions of the common interest, whatever they may be.

In his historical synthesis *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, historian Sean Wilentz importantly gives attention not just to the “great men” of American history (as his title might imply), but also to the faceless laborers, feminist activists, slave rebels, and abolitionists whose social actions shaped the democratic narrative from below just as it was being written from the

⁵⁸ *Reuters*, “Hawaiians Vote to Begin Sovereignty Process,” 11 September 1996.

top-down.⁵⁹ Of course, the American democracy has never truly been an egalitarian system designed to prioritize the rights of all people. Many types of people, including women and minorities have fought uphill battles for rights within the system. But white male landowners have not been the only automatically privileged “people” in the American democracy. Take, for example, the legal doctrine of corporate personhood. While the concept of corporate personhood predates the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, the statute happened to roughly coincide with the Industrial Revolution, which catapulted the corporation into a new realm of scale and economic importance. Since the passage of the 14th Amendment, the Supreme Court has held that the statute applies to corporations as well as people, bringing this preexisting principle into common law. Thus, a distinction is made in the American system, between “natural persons” and “artificial persons,” which are both considered categories of legal personalities.⁶⁰

In contrast to parliamentary systems of democracy, the American presidential system, with its Electoral College, heavy reliance on majority rule, and concentration of power in the executive branch, necessarily makes politics into a game of winners and losers. This has led to a two-party system, in which defeated parties are marginalized and third parties are largely voiceless. However, multiple levels and branches of government provide important checks and balances, introduce the opportunity for bipartisan perspectives in power, and form vehicles for policy change. Though concentrated at its face, power is distributed across a bureaucracy that limits individual autonomy and hurried or impassioned policy making.

⁵⁹ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998).

⁶⁰ Grahame Thompson, *Companies as ‘Cyborgs’? The Political Implications of Limited Liability, Legal Personality and Citizenship*, Working paper no. 75, Department of Business and Politics, Copenhagen Business School (Copenhagen, Denmark: Copenhagen Business School, 2011).

In attempting to trace the American democratic narrative, its most famous observer noted the compromises inevitable in the development of such a system. Central to the American narrative, Tocqueville recognized the importance of civil society, a free press, principles of social equality that limit the development of the aristocracy, and the appetite for material prosperity only matched by love of freedom and concern for public affairs. He praised the work ethic of Americans (termed the “Protestant ethic” at the open of the 20th century by Max Weber),⁶¹ and noted the air of opportunity that constituted the “American dream.” However, he also raised a concern that “an excessive love of prosperity can harm that very prosperity,” and in industrialism he saw the seeds of both the coming aristocracy and the expansionist narrative, already brewing within the fresh tide of American democracy.⁶²

B. THE NARRATIVE OF EXPANSION

Central to the narrative of expansion is the myth of abundance, now thoroughly critiqued (but not discarded) by advanced understanding of ecosystems and resource depletion. Though central to American history, the narrative of expansion really starts at the agricultural revolution. The transition from hunting and gathering to cultivation radically altered man’s understanding of his place in the world, such that he was suddenly able to spend much less of his energy on the provision of basic necessities. The control over the means of production afforded by agriculture, and the development of harvests that produced excess where once there had been scarcity, can be seen as fundamentally formative to the development of humanity’s understanding of its place in the world. In this worldview, the Earth was (and is) man’s to cultivate, control, and consume.

⁶¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London, England: Routledge, 2013), 135.

⁶² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Cambridge, England: Sever and Francis, 1863), 635.

Likewise, the settlers of the “new world” that would become the United States of America were quickly convinced not only of the abundance of their environment, but of the mandate to colonize it. The near-genocidal speed and fervor with which the native populations of this new world were dispatched—first in the 18th century and continuing through the 19th is evidence of the budding narrative of expansion at work. “Manifest destiny” was a subject of early debate among the forefathers; as Daniel Walker Howe explains, American imperialism was not a matter of immediate American consensus; this, in fact, provoked bitter dissent among the polity, with many believing America’s moral mission to be one of “democratic example rather than conquest.”⁶³

In tracing the democratic narrative, we saw the project of building the American state. Building the American *nation* required that “we” must be able to differentiate ourselves from “them.” This is a project of identity-building rather than institution building. It is a cultural project—shared language, traditions and customs are all necessary to the formation of a shared narrative. Importantly, however, the establishment of a group identity not only requires a shared narrative, but also the establishment of an *other*. Of course, once it has been identified, the other must be dealt with. Therefore, *nation-state* building inevitably entails some form of institutionalized cleansing of the other (whether ethnic or otherwise). Native Americans, for their part, were systematically stamped out by successive American leaders from George Washington to Andrew Jackson (with varying levels of success and enthusiasm).⁶⁴

The War of 1812, the westward march of American settlement (codified by the Homestead Act), the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War, and the Philippine-American War were all outflows of the narrative of expansion. But there is more to expansion than abundance: central to the mandate of expansion is the idea of American exceptionalism. Tocqueville’s treatise may

⁶³ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

⁶⁴ Barbara Alice Mann, *George Washington’s War on Native America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 5.

have been instrumental here, insofar as it centers around the uniqueness of the American character. By the early 20th century, this idea was firmly implanted within the national narrative, such that in asking Congress to declare war on Germany in April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson used the justification that “the world must be made safe for democracy.”⁶⁵ The period of colonialism at the beginning of the 20th century provided additional vehicles for American exceptionalism and expansion, while WWII afforded the United States another opportunity to play the role of world savior. The multilateral reorganization of nation-states that followed (as evidenced by the formation of the United Nations) put an end to traditional forms of conquest, but the directive to spread democracy and fight its ideological enemies was by that point firmly entrenched in American foreign policy.

The American dream—that the opportunity to prosper should be available to all under the right form of governance—is held dear by the narratives of both democracy and expansion. Of course, within a capitalist system, all who seek to prosper cannot really attain the American dream. The structures of the welfare state that have sprung up, translating tax revenues into social protections, serve as a systemic safety net, and arise in opposition to (but ultimately in support of) the capitalist project. As privileged legal personalities, corporations are not weakened by this arrangement, in spite of the historical push and pull over labor rights and social protections. Through the vehicle of American foreign policy and the narrative of expansion, the model of capitalist democracy has spread across the globe. The highly globalized and interconnected global economy can at least partially be viewed as a complex consequence of the expansionist narrative. But how did such an interdependent system arise out of the systematic conquest of peoples and territories? How could one nation be both imperialist and liberator to the world’s people? To more fully understand the dynamics, we must survey the narrative of war, founded upon the myth of human dominance.

⁶⁵ Woodrow Wilson, Sixty-Fifth Congress, 1 Session, Senate Document No. 5., April 2, 1917, provided online by George Mason University: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/>.

C. THE WAR NARRATIVE

In order to trace the origins of the militarized lens through which American foreign policy continues to operate in spite of widespread global cooperation and interdependence, we must look to evolutionary history. According to Kirkpatrick Sale:

From about 12,000 to 8,000 years ago, agriculture became the established way of life for the great majority of the world's people—and when I say 'way of life' I mean that in the fullest sense. Agriculture was not simply a way of getting food, satisfying one basic human need. Agriculture cemented in the human mind the psychology by which people understood their world: it was we who chose what seeds to plant and where, what forests to cut down...in short what species were to live and die, and when and how. Agriculture was a superb demonstration that humans could control nature (or believe they could); that humans could literally domesticate nature and place it under regular and systematic human will and design.⁶⁶

Intimately connected to the myth of abundance, then, is the myth of human dominance. That some species—and, by extension, some people—can and should exercise dominion over others is foundational to warfare as an extension of human politics.

But while the narrative of expansion carried the United States through several wars of conquest and annexation, the narrative of war itself was not codified into the structures of government itself until after the close of WWII. The foundational National Security Act of 1947, George Kennan's policy of containment, the development of nuclear weapons (and thus nuclear deterrence), and National Security Report 68 (NSC-68) in 1950 were all instrumental in developing the structures of a militarized and interventionist foreign policy. In particular, the National Security Act of 1947 articulated a national security ideology that marked Pearl Harbor as a major lesson of American military experience. Specifically, Pearl Harbor redefined American

⁶⁶ Kirkpatrick Sale, "Agriculture: Civilization's 'Great Mistake,'" *Vermont Commons* 12 (2006): 12.

vulnerability, and provided justification for a much more systematic approach to defense and security. Preparing for the next attack became a full-time function of the state.⁶⁷

Nuclear deterrence, in particular, taught the nascent national security state several lessons. The rapid military demobilization that first followed WWII was to be short lived, as within a few years, it became clear that the USSR was determined to negate the United States' asymmetric nuclear advantage. From the U.S. perspective, the Soviet move to level the playing field was interpreted as a nuclear *threat*. Coinciding with a conventional build-up for intervention in Korea, in 1950, NSC-68 led to buildup of nuclear weapons, which saw us go from 6 nuclear weapons in 1945 to 27,000 in 1975. "The intensity of the Cold War had endowed the atomic bomb with an immediate relevance that it might not have developed if international relations had been more relaxed."⁶⁸ This intensity became the Cold War—essentially an arms race made stable only by mutually assured destruction—and hawkish paranoia reigned strategy until the 1960s, when the situation reached a boiling point as a new generation of strategists took office.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. and USSR "stood eyeball to eyeball," and as Secretary of State Dean Rusk famously put it, "the other fellow just blinked." As it turns out, Khrushchev had turned his missile-carrying freighters around some 30 hours before this supposedly close call, but this foundational myth became characteristic of the Cold War era. As Michael Dobbs argues, it became a justification for brinksmanship in foreign policy.⁶⁹ A lesson of deterrence could have seen the U.S. begin to spin its nuclear advantage toward a securer of peace from the get-go, but instead, policy decisions at every turn escalated nuclear proliferation and kept nuclear weapons at the forefront of U.S.

⁶⁷ Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law That Transformed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 738.

⁶⁹ Michael Dobbs, "The Price of a 50-Year Myth," *The New York Times*, October 15, 2012.

military policy. As Secretary of State John Foster Dulles said in 1954: the U.S. intends to deter aggression “primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing.”⁷⁰ The policy path of military interventionism was thus set upon, spurred largely by the American nuclear advantage. This had the effect of solidifying our military reliance on nuclear weapons while forcing our allies to align with them as well. The decades-long arms race with the Soviet Union, as well as the lingering directive to maintain credibility in the security realm through shows of strength, can both be seen as having arisen out of the same foundational myth of dominance that underscored both American expansion and the agricultural revolution.

“Pax Americana” has come to describe the period of relative peace characterized by the dominance of the United States in foreign policy over the latter half of the 20th century, but this term obscures the proxy wars and massive fiscal expenditures of the national security state over this period.⁷¹ The bureaucracies created to serve the national security state not only created thousands (now millions) of jobs, they did what all bureaucracies are designed to do: ensured *process*. The similarity of the governmental reaction to 9/11 and Pearl Harbor—two attacks on the homeland whose similarities end there—is no mistake: our systems, structures and processes were constructed to deal with the mid-century-modern world; the pre-information revolution world—for the Cold War world. Of ultimate importance to these structures is to command and control; to achieve dominance and superiority; to stay one step ahead of the Soviets.

Importantly, the dissolution of the Soviet Union left a “threat vacuum” in the global order. In contrast to the stark binary Cold War world, the globalized world is complex and interconnected. In fact, nation-states not the only influential actors on the international security scene; multinational corporations and networks of non-state actors both wield outsized influence in global events, and

⁷⁰ Paret, Craig, and Gilbert, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 738.

⁷¹ Douglas T. Stuart, ed. “Organizing for National Security,” *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College*. (Washington, DC: Publications and Production Office, 2000), 143.

as the former have spread Western values across the globe, the latter have hardened in opposition. In fact, even absent direct military intervention, the influence of American culture can be seen as an occupying force in some parts of the world. Far from “the end of history” foreseen by Francis Fukuyama,⁷² however, the narrative of Western liberal democracy has been challenged by the post-Soviet threat vacuum. As we will see, the contemporary period of complexity is characterized by narrative fragmentation, leaving the dominance of the American political form in question, if not crisis.

⁷² Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

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V. CONTEMPORARY COMPETING NARRATIVES

A. COMPLEXITY AND CHAOS (A CHANGING WORLD)

That the world is changing quickly is palpable, and so must America's role in the world adapt to shifting conditions and constraints. Largely in lieu of other immediate threats, and largely in reaction to the highly symbolic nature of the events of 9/11/2001 (in which airplanes were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon), non-state actors and the rise of global extremism are seen as the number one national security threat facing America today. What makes us strong also makes us vulnerable, as the openness and civic freedom that has defined our hegemonic rise also leaves us susceptible and without robust defenses against the contagion of ideas that threaten or oppose our culture and/or policies. In fact, the Global War on Terrorism was the literal declaration of war on a tactic, while its subtext is more concerned with fighting a war on ideas. This militaristic response, rather than advancing us toward a safer geopolitical atmosphere in which to maintain hegemonic influence, has instead had the effect of underscoring the very interventionist attitude that terrorism arises in reaction to. And so the many narrative threads of American culture coalesce into complexity. Tracing these threads in the contemporary operational environment will be instructive as we consider a path through narrative fragmentation.

B. THE DEMOCRATIC NARRATIVE

Though democracy as a form of government has not been disrupted by a compelling alternative, its narrative has suffered. As younger generations have come to look critically on the "dream" of America as a land of unparalleled opportunity, citizens have increasingly come to question whether meaningful policy change is possible in American democracy. Jonathan Rauch coined the term "demosclerosis" to describe "government's progressive loss of the ability to

adapt.”⁷³ In my analysis, this is a symptom of narrative fragmentation, though it is also the effect of an increasingly complex system. Robert Reich, meanwhile, situates the problem as a failure of democratic discourse, in which the sides on a given issue have become so divided that they are essentially not even speaking the same language.⁷⁴

Dating back to the days of Tocqueville, the robustness of public/civic discourse has served as a proxy measure of an informed citizenry. The democratic state derives its strength from its people, who buy into the state’s authority not only because it benefits them directly, but also because they *identify* as a part of its process—as a citizen. The responsibility of informing the citizenry (and thus shaping public discourse) has traditionally laid with the media, the realm encapsulating the newspaper, the original home of the “imagined community.” Because the American system is designed so that all citizens are equal in their rights and equal before the law, in principle each individual has an equal role to play in the public discourse, and finds power through the collective, in uniting their interests with others, creating a “common good.”

“Civil society,” meanwhile, collectively refers to the level of community engagement in a polity. Daniel Posner defines it as “the reservoir of formal and informal organizations in society outside state control.”⁷⁵ Running parallel to political society, civil society encapsulates the many ways, virtual and material, that citizens network and join together, establishing a common narrative. Put succinctly, civil society could be called that portion of human capital actively invested in the common good. Civil society is a good barometer for civic engagement and political participation because it indicates “buy-in”— that citizens are stakeholders in the state. If the state is not useful to its stakeholders,

⁷³ Jonathan Rauch, *Demosclerosis: The Silent Killer of American Government* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 120.

⁷⁴ Robert Reich, “The Lost Art of Democratic Narrative,” *The New Republic*, March 28, 2005.

⁷⁵ Daniel Posner, “Civil Society and the Reconstruction of Failed States,” in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert Rotberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 237.

it will not be functional. “Social capital,” meanwhile, has been defined by Francis Fukuyama as the “set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits them to cooperate with one another.”⁷⁶ Social capital enables civil society by establishing between people, which ideally leads to trust between people and government. Thus, civil society can be seen as the middleman between citizenry and government. Social capital, then, is the build-up of trust that decreases the transaction costs of daily life and contributes to the growth of civil society. Here, social capital and civil society are reinforcing phenomena. However, there are signs that some of the feedback loops that have traditionally driven equilibrium in the pursuit of a “common good” have been tainted by perverse incentives over recent decades, putting democratic ideals at risk.

An instructive example can be found in the issue of civil society and the U.S. media. Academics have noted with concern that the last two decades have seen an upheaval in traditional American civil society. Though we are more networked than ever, in the words of Robert Putnam we are increasingly “bowling alone,” potentially squandering the important resource of “social capital”—a term developed independently at least six times over the course of the twentieth century to describe the effects on productivity of social ties.⁷⁷ The classical activities through which Americans demonstrated buy-in have declined in importance as the pace of technological and social change—and thus life—has sped up. Interestingly, the Internet feeds into natural human tendencies to search for reflections of themselves in others, the search for identity—thus the explosion of networking activity online, which knows no national boundaries. Spurred by technological progress, population growth, and information proliferation, the media has increasingly come to shape culture and public discourse. From

⁷⁶ Francis Fukuyama, “Social Capital,” in *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, ed. Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 98.

⁷⁷ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 19.

newspaper to radio, to television and now the Internet, the information trajectory has led us toward an increasingly interconnected and ultra-informed society.

Counter-intuitively, as media outlets have proliferated (both in form and function), media ownership has consolidated. A relatively few number of corporate conglomerates own the majority of major media outlets, meaning that the majority of news sources answer to a small number of shareholders and not the population with a stake in that news. However, there is also an opposite evolution occurring; the rise of the Internet has spawned myriad avenues of personal and individual expression. There has been an explosion of what many term “citizen media,” the blogs, forums, wikis and web pages that individual users create—usually not for profit-driven motives, but because the Internet gives them a voice. Understandably, this citizen media is largely bias-driven, and therefore does not supplant the media’s responsibilities to the public democratic sphere.

Though media consolidation is less evident online, where the individual user has seemingly equal access to billions of pages from myriad media outlets, many of the most popular sites are, in fact, owned by the same conglomerates and are subject to the same pressures as their traditional components. Regardless of the intangible importance of commonality and shared experience, market forces dictate that corporate-owned media is most interested in those communities that generate profit— not communities of citizens but communities of consumers. Consumer preferences therefore dictate how the media segments individuals; these divisions can occur along class/socio-economic boundaries, occupational sectors (i.e., public vs. private or by industry), partisan fault lines, racial/ethnic divisions, or along any number of polarizing boundaries of identity. As termed by Eli Pariser, the “filter bubble” that develops as people consume only that media directly relevant to their interests tends to be self-reinforcing and contributes to both narrative fragmentation and democratic malaise.⁷⁸ In its marriage to capitalism, and particularly in its extension of the legal rights of

⁷⁸ Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 10.

people to corporations, the democratic narrative underwrites this segmentation of civil society.

C. THE EXPANSIONIST NARRATIVE

Capitalism and consumption are at work keeping the expansionist narrative alive, as well, though outright conquest of the Earth's peoples or territories is no longer considered an appropriate activity. Instead, the expansionist narrative can be found in the trajectory of resource consumption and in the drumbeat of economic growth. And where it coalesces with the democratic narrative, it can also be found in the justification of foreign intervention by the argument of democracy promotion. The project of democracy promotion has, in fact, been so successful, that the narrative of expansion (and, by extension, excess) has seeped into every corner of the globe. And while the globalized world is a relatively peaceful one,⁷⁹ its appetite is voracious.

The interrelated byproducts of the systems of contemporary civilization include population growth, greenhouse gas emissions, and shortages of fresh water and arable land. The potential for widespread ecological breakdown, popularly characterized as "climate change," has received significant scientific and public attention in the last five years. And while the perspective of the current project is national, these are issues that affect the entire biosphere. In its perspective on nature as something to be dominated and shaped to human ends, the expansionist narrative drives cultural systems toward existential crisis.

It is tempting to situate the problem with consumerism: the Western approach to the frictionless satisfaction of every appetite, fueled by capitalism and supported by policies and marketplaces preferential to corporations. In wicked problem territory, however, every effort to locate "the problem" will find a symptom of a deeper problem. Similarly, the expansionist narrative itself can be seen as a symptom of a central tenet of civilization itself: that nature is man's to

⁷⁹ Steven Pinker, "A History of Violence," *The New Republic*, March 19, 2007.

conquer, dominate and, rise above. Nature as “other” is fundamental to civilization, the central myth at the root of both expansion and war.⁸⁰

D. THE WAR NARRATIVE

As it turned out, the divisive and symbolic nature of the attacks of 9/11 fit nicely into a preexisting American doctrine, penned largely by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, whose *clash of civilizations* thesis was a post-Cold War prophecy waiting to unfold. In hindsight, the concept that there are trajectories of “modernity” (sometimes called “multiple modernities”) that are distinct from the Western path of development rightfully negates the staunchly adversarial attitude of the clash of civilizations narrative,⁸¹ however, once blame for the attacks was assigned to al-Qa’ida, the political and military response to 9/11 unfolded almost as if predetermined.

In his classic treatise on strategy, Liddell-Hart cautions, “the object in war is to attain a better peace...hence it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire.”⁸² In the Global War on Terror, the underlying battle should be for peace with the Muslim world. Seen in this light, the militarized reaction to the events of 9/11 seem antithetical to a long-term peace; in reacting to a gross expression of hostility toward American intervention in the Middle East with an invasion of a Middle-Eastern country, we essentially replicated the very system in which we were trying to intervene. Metaphors and allusions to Pearl Harbor were ubiquitous in the months following the events, mentally preparing citizens for protracted conflict. Ultimately, the reactionary unilateral doctrine adopted and series of globally controversial policy decisions that the U.S. undertook following 9/11 were ultimately a naïve and self-centered response to a narrative much older than any contemporary civilization.

⁸⁰ Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992), 152.

⁸¹ Dale Eickelman, “Culture and Identity in the Middle East: How They Influence Governance,” in *Fighting Chance: Global Trends and Shocks in the National Security Environment*, edited by Neyla Arnas. (Washington DC: NDU Press, 2009).

⁸² BH Liddell-Hart, *Strategy* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1991), 366.

Terrorism is the Achilles heel of western-dominated globalization, its spectacle of symbolic death the antidote to hegemonic humanism. Just as there could be no good without bad, and no light without dark, the strength of the international order since the end of WWII demands an adversary—the “threat vacuum.” The violent extremist threat, while not an actual challenge to American power, challenges American hegemony.⁸³ As Jean Baudrillard put it, “If Islam dominated the world, terrorism would fight against it.”⁸⁴ The nebulous extremist threat we face from non-state actors, then, can be seen as the systemic and even necessary response to the dominant international order of globalization, whose principles include commitment to multilateral management of an open world economy and whose rhetoric calls for the stabilization of socioeconomic welfare.⁸⁵

Politics is not just a struggle over the control or conquest of populations and resources. Politics is fundamentally a contest to capture imaginations, a competition to construct the meanings of symbols.⁸⁶ When a particular system of values has virtually colonized the globe, push back is to be expected. This realization: that the terrorist threat we face is not cultural or ideological but rather systemic, should shake us from the post-Cold War paradigm entirely. Dated ideas of the “end of history,” and its competitor, the “clash of civilizations” are shortsighted and additionally fail to represent both the concurrent complexity of the geopolitical realm and the simplicity of the fundamental reality that the earth is an ecosystem of ecosystems; only through systemic means can we promote the security we seek.

⁸³ Michelle Shevin, “Narrative and Naiveté in National Security,” in *Finalist Essays from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security’s Fourth Annual Essay Competition*, Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security, 2011. <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=696054>

⁸⁴ Jean Baudrillard, “The Spirit of Terrorism.” *Le Monde* 2 November 2001.

⁸⁵ John Ikenberry, “The Myth of Post Cold War Chaos,” *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 1996.

⁸⁶ Dale Eickelman, “Culture and Identity in the Middle East: How They Influence Governance,” in Neyla Arnas, ed. *Fighting Chance: Global Trends and Shocks in the National Security Environment* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2009), 163.

E. THE SUSTAINABILITY (NON-)NARRATIVE

Prescribed at times as a world-changing panacea, “sustainability” has become a catchall term, a rally cry, and a competing narrative to the drumbeat of growth, consumption, and militarization. “Sustainable development,” meanwhile, has come to describe an approach to continuing economic growth without depriving future generations of the opportunity to thrive. Rising to prominence in policy circles in the 1990s, this mandate has had mixed success, arguably because it attempts to marry two mutually exclusive directives: rapid growth and long-term prosperity.⁸⁷ The sustainability movement arose out of increased awareness of the ecological impact of human/industrial activities, and is related to environmentalism. Rather than propose a fundamental restructuring of our relationship to nature, however, the environmental movement has too often positioned itself in opposition to humans, replicating the categorical dualism of nature/culture rather than altering it. This is largely a design flaw—ecology is not only steeped in nature/culture but is founded on it. Sustainability suffers the same fate.

At scale, even “sustainable development” projects end up replicating and reifying the underlying dynamics of our unsustainable system. Incentives and subsidies designed to stimulate economic growth (itself now understood to be a fundamentally unsustainable goal) necessarily pervert any ecological aspirations of massive renewable energy projects, green housing developments, and other infrastructural undertakings. With the combined effects and troubling trajectory of continuing consumption of coal and other fossil fuels, population growth, and unabated greenhouse gas emissions, any “progress” achieved thus far by the green movement appears stunted at best. The sustainability movement’s greatest successes, in fact, appear as one-off triumphs of individual ingenuity: for example, the grassroots reforestation of an area of Bornean forest led by social

⁸⁷ Michael Redclift. “Sustainable Development (1987–2005): An Oxymoron Comes of Age,” *Sustainable Development* 13 (2005): 213.

entrepreneur Willie Smits.⁸⁸ Compelling narratives like this one are the exception; an effective critique of the movement is that it lacks a cohesive story—a vision of the future.⁸⁹

With all of the accumulated knowledge, increased flows of information, scientific discovery, and advanced technology in the modern world, why do we seem doomed to repeat the same mistakes? Perhaps we have never been modern. This is the thesis advanced by scholars including Bruno Latour, whose work on the sociology of science effectively traces the foundation of “modern” reality back to a fundamental—and false—dichotomy between nature and culture. According to Latour, the emergence of “modern” science, with its reliance on fact and purification, cemented a fundamental separation between nature and culture as fundamental to society—not only a fictional construct but also hugely problematic in the face of contemporary environmental, scientific, and political problems.⁹⁰

As technoscience scholar Donna Haraway writes in *The Promises of Monsters*,

Excruciatingly conscious of nature’s discursive constitution as ‘other’ in the histories of colonialism, racism, sexism, and class domination of many kinds, we nonetheless find in this problematic, ethno-specific, long-lived, and mobile concept something we cannot do without, but can never ‘have.’ We must find another relationship to nature besides reification and possession...immense resources have been expended to stabilize and materialize nature, to police

⁸⁸ Nancy Roberts. “Tackling Wicked Problems in Indonesia: A Bottom-Up Design Approach to Reducing Crime and Corruption,” (paper presented to the 2012 Conference of the International Public Management Network, Innovations in Public Management for Combating Corruption, Honolulu, Hawaii, June 27-29, 2012).

⁸⁹ Jo Confino, “Sustainability movement will fail unless it creates a compelling future vision,” *The Guardian*, September 23, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/sustainability-movement-fail-future>.

⁹⁰ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 62.

its/her boundaries. Such expenditures have had disappointing results.”⁹¹

In 1754, Jean Jacques Rousseau published his seminal piece, *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, in an attempt to examine inequality among men and whether this inequality is natural. He opposed the Hobbesian view of man as savage and violent in asserting that in his natural state, man is similar to any other animal, except that he is a compassionate being with free will and the ability to deny his instincts. It is the denial of these instincts, and the tendency towards “perfectibility,” that leads man away from this state of nature.⁹² Similarly, *Ishmael* author Daniel Quinn traces the roots of “modern civilization” back to a fundamental myth: that humans can and should dominate the planet.⁹³ In every major activity of civilization (agricultural cultivation, energy production, war, etc.), man is at a fundamental level enacting a program of domination that is central to the very idea of civilization itself.

If we agree that the dichotomy between nature and culture is a false one (how can anything that exists be outside of nature?), and that the systems of “modern” civilization are founded on an unsustainable directive to control, dominate, and deplete our ecological environment, then the appears literally self-destructive. In 2011, two defense strategists took up the mantle of sustainability in calling for a new national narrative to guide policy and decision-making. In “A National Strategic Narrative,” CAPT Wayne Porter (USN) and (now retired) Marine Col Mark Mykleby advocate several strategic shifts with specific regard to the national security state. Writing as “Mr. Y” to echo the gravity of George to Kennan’s compelling argument for containment written as “Mr. X,” the authors explicitly advocate the development of a national narrative geared toward

⁹¹ Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters,” in *Cultural Studies*, ed. L. Grossberg et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 296.

⁹² Jean Jacques Rousseau. “Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men,” *Constitution Society*. <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/ineq.htm>.

⁹³ Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael* (New York: Bantam/Turner, 1992), 154.

sustainability. Rather than a story about threats to American exceptionalism and dominance, the national security narrative should be a story about seizing opportunity. Specifically, they call for five shifts:

1. *“From control in a closed system to credible influence in an open system”*

Control in an open system is not only impossible; attempts at control tend to have undesirable downstream effects. Where containment was designed for an international security environment in which limited flows of information and capital lent predictability to a relatively closed system, today’s operational environment requires the development of a policy approach that seeks to shape and guide rather than control global events. In practice, this in many cases means shifting priorities from active engagement in global events to building credibility and clout.

2. *“From containment to sustainment”*

The Global War on Terror can be seen as an application of the containment strategy to the issue of terrorism, signaling that in lieu of a successor, we are continuing to approach defense from an outwardly-focused perspective (i.e., seeking and responding to external threats). In order to refocus on building credible influence, however, we must look inward to sustaining our resources (ranging from ecological health to youth education). External engagement should be undertaken carefully, and only through international partnership.

3. *“From deterrence and defense to civilian engagement and competition”*

In the authors’ view (and that of now-retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen), the national deficit is the largest single threat to American national security. The massive spending, energy, and political focus outlaid on traditional “defense” activities must be redistributed to reflect the importance of economic security, environmental security, and other threats to the longevity of American interests. In practice, this would include a new narrative on trade (signaling a willingness to compete internationally without protectionism), a major

investment in education, and development of next-generation infrastructure and energy sources. Here, issues such as student debt and growing income inequality can be seen as threats worthy of coordinated and targeted response.

4. *“From zero sum to positive sum global politics/economics”*

The ascendancy of China as a global superpower has been traditionally viewed with concern by the policy establishment, if not a sense of suspicion or helplessness. Traditionally, international relations has been dominated by zero-sum games. However, the world has changed, as demonstrated by the example that China’s growth has been a net positive for East Asian stability as well as for the U.S. economy. The characteristic interdependency of today’s networked world creates shared interests and myriad opportunities for multi-stakeholder prosperity.

5. *“From national security to national prosperity and security”*

The authors do not deny that threats to American security are real, and in advocating a strategic focus on opportunity rather than defense, they acknowledge the need to maintain a capable and technologically advanced military capable of deterring and responding to both traditional and irregular threats. The argument, then, is not to dismantle the structures of the national security state, but to evolve structures to move past threats (an inherent feature of the security ecosystem) toward a focus on seizing opportunities and converging interests. Here, they call for a National Prosperity and Security Act to replace the National Security Act of 1947. Just as the latter brought “national security” (a union of foreign affairs and defense) into the public policy lexicon, a replacement act would signal a fundamental recognition that internal prosperity deserves first billing in conversations about national strength.⁹⁴

Although generally well received at the time of its publication (in 2011 by the Woodrow Wilson Center), the “National Strategic Narrative” failed to gain official endorsement from the policy establishment. And while many were excited

⁹⁴ Wayne Porter and Mark “Puck” Mykleby (“Mr. Y”). “A National Strategic Narrative (With preface by Anne-Marie Slaughter),” *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 2011, 2-13. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf>.

to see such ringing endorsements for the principles of “sustainability” coming from top Pentagon strategists (if not from the Pentagon itself), the piece was only a beginning; in using the language of the establishment to call for change in the name of preserving the status quo, the piece offered strategy and policy alternatives but ultimately fell short of suggesting a compelling vision for the future—the new narrative suggested by the title. Still, CAPT Porter subsequently established a Chair of Systemic Strategy and Complexity at the Naval Postgraduate School,⁹⁵ adding to the thriving systems-thinking discipline there, and, importantly, both Porter and Mykleby have been working to implement the approach at the regional level to show communities what more sustainable and efficient systems would look like. As the latter emphasizes, “for a grand strategy to work...we have to have an engaged citizenry.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Amanda Stein, “Former CJCS Advisor Capt. Wayne Porter Fills New Chair of Systemic Strategy and Complexity,” *Naval Postgraduate School*, November 29, 2011, <http://www.nps.edu/About/News/Former-CJCS-Advisor-Capt.-Wayne-Porter-Fills-New-Chair-of-Systemic-Strategy-and-Complexity-.html>.

⁹⁶ Kristine Wong, “Working toward national sustainability using a regional approach,” *Greenbiz.com*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.greenbiz.com/news/2013/04/11/working-towards-national-sustainability-using-regional-approach>.

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VI. THE WAY FORWARD

A. MUTUAL EXCLUSION AND NARRATIVE FRAGMENTATION

The sustainability movement's heretofore failure to envision a more symbiotic role for humanity in a more compelling story about the future is not simply a failure of imagination: it is a paradigmatic imperative. While "sustainability" is ostensibly meant to suggest the welfare of future generations, when viewed through the relatively myopic default human lens the word seems to imply the long-term continuation of the status quo, as opposed to a meaningful step-change in mindset and policy. The broad narratives of democracy, expansion, and war outlined herein have all been fundamentally compatible with the central myth of "modern civilization:" that nature is the domain of man to control and consume. In contrast, the double entendre of "sustainability" rings hollow; a story about the continuation of the status quo is simply not believable.

Perhaps this is by design: civilizations are doomed to self-destruct by their very magnitude, argues William Ophuls in *Immoderate Greatness: Why Civilizations Fail*. The push and pull of biophysical limits versus growth imperatives forms a macro feedback loop that sends the system inexorably, inevitably (though at variable speeds), toward collapse. It is no accident that simply calling to mind our own broad cultural narrative of "civilization" immediately suggests a rise and fall.⁹⁷ And while Ophuls ultimately prescribes a sort of survivalist mentality, Daniel Quinn, for his part, advocates bottom-up reorganization: a gradual shift toward "New Tribalism," or a return to the unit of human organization that has been most successful throughout human history. As bees hive and wolves pack, so do humans tribe.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ William Ophuls, *Immoderate Greatness: Why Civilizations Fail* (North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 65-67.

⁹⁸ Daniel Quinn, *The End of Civilization: Humanity's Next Great Adventure* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 173.

In spite of signs of unrest, including the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movement (which Daniel Quinn celebrated as a “collectivist revolution” in line with New Tribalism),⁹⁹ it is difficult to imagine a tribal way of life presenting a compelling alternative to the nation-state model of civilization, barring extreme/acute scenarios. However, in explaining why a regional approach to systems reconfiguration (specifically, an effort toward “full-spectrum sustainability” to include food, water, energy, education, transportation, and the built environment) was selected to apply the national sustainability strategy, Mark Mykleby highlights the importance of communities of people *experiencing a new way of life*: “...if you could do [hundreds] of these communities across the country...all of the sudden, citizens start experiencing something very different other than having to spend two weeks a year in their car or eating 19% of their meals in their vehicle and having the ancillary deleterious health effects.”¹⁰⁰

Strategy, after all, is only part of the narrative. The lived experience of being a citizen/ community member is equally important to security. Alongside infrastructure and resources, governance must a target of systemic change. Many issues relevant to governance, including education, gang violence, and public health, are in fact wicked problems. The complexity of the issues involved demands innovative approaches to problem solving like the systems-based regional approach advocated by Mykleby and employed by Porter in places like Salinas, California. In Salinas, a systems approach was used to model community dynamics, introducing the opportunity for increased learning and feedback in interventions to address gang violence and other issues.¹⁰¹ Importantly, the systems approach emphasizes observation, experimentation,

⁹⁹ Daniel Quinn, “To Protesters of the Occupy Movement,” *Ishmael.org*, accessed August 23, 2014, <http://www.ishmael.org/ows.cfm>.

¹⁰⁰ Wong, “Working toward national sustainability,” 2.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth Stewart, “Navy Strategist Applies Expertise to Development of Stronger Communities,” *Naval Postgraduate School*, July 31, 2014, <http://www.nps.edu/About/News/Navy-Strategist-Applies-Expertise-to-Development-of-Stronger-Communities.html>.

network effects, and long-term consequences, making it a valuable policy perspective.

A basic project of politics is to translate best practice into policy; policy-makers are charged with translating the outcomes of scientific discovery into the regulations that govern practice. But as William Ophuls explains in *Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology*,

To use Socratic language, the lie that underlies modern life has proven to be ignoble—to be a real lie instead of a useful and necessary social fiction. It claims that human beings are capable of rationally understanding and controlling both organic and human nature and of using the powerful means that rationality provides for mostly benign or even utopian ends. But history has belied this claim. The drive to dominate nature has generated a vicious circle of ecological self-destruction, an excess of rationality has unleashed a host of irrational forces...the pursuit of material gratification has spawned addiction and frustration, and the struggle to control economic complexity and social demoralization has fomented an ever-growing concentration of political and administrative power. Thus, “progress” has proven to be a myth in the pejorative sense of the word...The attempt to live “scientifically”—that is, to rely on reason unalloyed by myth—has failed. The political animal simply cannot exist without some kind of story that gives meaning and coherence to life and that provides the intellectual and moral basis for political community.¹⁰²

Science, then, will not deliver us from narrative fragmentation—rather, it has delivered sophisticated tools of measurement and observation that raise questions about the very nature of reality. As the focus of scientific inquiry has expanded to include topics including the fabric of spacetime, the plasticity of genetics, and the nature of consciousness, it almost seems a new vocabulary is required to reflect a reimagined story about the role of humanity in nature.

¹⁰² William Ophuls, *Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2013), 123.

B. SEEKING COHESION

Policy confusion, political stalemate, and declining indicators of economic and population health can all be seen as symptoms of narrative fragmentation. But the competition of multiple narratives alone does not account for contemporary malaise; in fact, narrative competition is key to healthy discourse, debate, and policy change. However, in today's increasingly complex operational environment, the pervasive influence of the militarized structures so fundamental to our system precludes real competition among narratives: just as the narrative of sustainability translates to the somewhat oxymoronic policy directive of sustainable development, the fundamental structures of the system ensure business as usual, even when that business seems to be speeding toward collapse. The promise of democracy begins to appear empty without real choices; the narrative of expansion buckles in the face of scarce resources; the shape of conflict shifts as the war machine continues unabated. Collapse appears inevitable, and yet life goes on. According to WJT Mitchell, "we live in a time that is best described as a limbo of continually deferred expectations and anxieties. Everything is about to happen, or perhaps it has already happened without our noticing it."¹⁰³ The crisis is never acute enough to motivate action until it is so acute that measured, non-reactionary response is impossible (as was the case after the events of September 11, 2001).

When sensemaking in complexity, we may find deeper meaning hidden behind our metaphors. In particular, the popular designation for the massive financial and political organizations of today, "too big to fail," will be instructive as we consider the narratives competing for dominance within the American system. Any complex adaptive system seeks to remain at equilibrium; promotion of the status quo becomes a more central directive the larger and more complex the system becomes. Our centralized structures of organization and operation are increasingly understood to be ripe for disruption from the edges of the system

¹⁰³ WJT Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 321-22.

(where both violent extremism and game-changing innovation reside), while society is largely in agreement that the system's consumption of resources is unsustainable.

According to Judith Innes and David Booher:

A complex adaptive system emerges in nature when the environment is unstable, but not completely chaotic. Stable environments lead to systems in equilibrium, which are not likely to adapt if major changes occur. In chaotic environments, systems cannot find productive patterns. At the edge of chaos—a good analogy to the current period of social transformation—innovation and dramatic shifts in activity patterns can occur, and systems can move to higher levels of performance. Such innovation, however, depends on information flows through linked networks of agents. Consensus building can provide such links and help participants to do their individual parts in the larger system.¹⁰⁴

It is clear that decentralization of power, unfettered flows of information, and community-based consensus-building would all be ingredients of a more secure system.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps then, what is needed is not just a new narrative on which to build policy and reimagine the “American community,” but a new paradigm on which to design the fundamental structures of our system.

C. REIMAGINING THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Central to the idea of the “American community” is the American media. As discussed herein, deregulation and media consolidation have fragmented the cohesion of the imagined American community. However, a new trend among media outlets to “explain,” rather than simply report, is relevant here. In contrast to a seeming trend away from long-form writing, online media outlets have space to provide more background, context, and narrative than their print predecessors. Major media outlets including the *New York Times* and *The Economist* have developed dedicated “explainer” sections, while brand new outlets such as

¹⁰⁴ Judith Innes and David Booher, “Consensus Building and Complex Adaptive Systems: A Framework for Evaluating Collaborative Planning,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65 no.4 (1999): 417.

¹⁰⁵ Innes and Booher, “Consensus Building and Complex Adaptive Systems,” 417.

Vox.com have made it their mission to “explain the news.” Wikipedia, for its part, can be understood as a collective (citizen-led) effort to explain boundless extant phenomena.¹⁰⁶ The growth of social media, meanwhile, with its frictionless ability to share and comment on the news of the day, is an important tool of the engaged citizenry. Pew found that in 2013, about half of social media users shared news articles across their networks.¹⁰⁷

In fact, in 2003–2004—importantly, prior to the development of ad-funded social networking sites like Facebook—sociologist Felicia Wu Song studied virtual communities including Craigslist and Meetup.com and found civil society and even democratic practice alive and well in free associations of like-minded citizens. However, while democratic ideals including free speech, egalitarianism, and individual autonomy were visible in the practice and conduct of these communities, analysis of their user-generated content revealed the realities of online life: mediated, commercialized, and subject to both state and corporate surveillance.¹⁰⁸ And though many of the thirty virtual communities studied by Song are still thriving, ad-supported social networks like Facebook are currently dominant in the collective consciousness. Thus, the self-reinforcing filter bubble remains a concern, but with many pockets of civil society to be found in the vastness of cyberspace, and with even corporate forces organizing to provide meta-comment on competing narratives (with a thriving citizen blogosphere and enough competition to provide some checks on bias), there is hope for cohesive discourse and even narrative cohesion in the American polity.

Media consumption aside, however, it is clear that narrative fragmentation continues to be an issue for the American community. In Ferguson, Missouri, for example, racial tension and issues of the militarization of “public safety” have

¹⁰⁶ *The Economist*, “The fashion for ‘explainer’ articles,” June 8, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/06/economist-explains-3>.

¹⁰⁷ *The Economist*, “Digital resurrection,” March 29, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21599784-some-moderately-good-news-news-industry-digital-resurrection>.

¹⁰⁸ Felicia Wu Song, *Virtual Communities: Bowling Alone, Online Together* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 48.

reached a boiling point. Following the shooting of an unarmed black teenager in August 2014, police responded to citizen protests armed with full body armor, assault rifles, and tear gas (which was fired into the crowds). The “us versus them” mentality that crystallized so quickly in Ferguson is common in urban areas across the US, where many police forces have been mandated to militarize in the post-9/11 environment. And insofar as the threats of terrorism and homegrown extremism are real, it makes sense to be prepared. However, terrorism is extremely rare—how might police be able to maintain a force capable of countering and responding to real emergencies without viewing every security issue through the lens of counterterrorism? Of course, any effort to de-escalate the homeland security narrative or reverse this build-up of military capabilities would be politically unpalatable under the current system: not only would a policy-maker be accused of leaving his or her district unprepared for the threat of terrorism, but incentives and realities of federal financing ensure that lawmakers face pressure to keep security spending high. There is even a program at the Pentagon to transfer surplus military equipment to local police forces.¹⁰⁹ Troubling though the effects may be, the militarization of American police forces and the repression of public protest are natural extensions of the militarized response to terrorism abroad, just as that response was a program and function of the structures and systems of the national security state.

In fact, repression is both a natural response to terrorism and its analogue; the path of continuing regulation replicates that “uncontrollable unraveling of reversibility” that Baudrillard called “the true victory of terrorism.”¹¹⁰ The instinct to shut down, isolate and attack in the wake of terror is the very response its architects seek to elicit. The beast is brought to its knees not by the initial attack (itself just a spectacle in a grander drama), but by the outsized response provoked. Here, the political and economic stagnation arising in response to

¹⁰⁹ Matt Apuzzo, “After Ferguson Unrest, Senate Reviews Use of Military-Style Gear by Police,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/10/us/ferguson-unrest-senate-police-weapons-hearing.html>.

¹¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, “The Spirit of Terrorism,” *Le Monde*, November 2, 2001.

terror is inevitably mirrored by a systemic repression that undermines the very values of the system. Democratic ideals including freedom, equality, independence, and individuality are all threatened –in theory by terrorism, but in practice by the state’s response to it. This corrosion is a true existential threat; the criminalization and marginalization of non-violent citizens, the militarization of the public safety system, and the symbolic prophesied threat of “big brother” contribute to a fragmentation of the national narrative that could dwarf the impact of the actions of extremists and non-state actors.

However, that I am able to write a thesis critical of the established system from within a military institution is evidence of a broader paradigm shift occurring in American government, academia, and society. Echoed in the “national prosperity and security narrative” advocated by Porter and Mykleby, this shift recognizes that an open system is both strengthened and made vulnerable by its openness, and that the solution to this vulnerability is resilience, not retrenchment. It understands that the enemy is an organizational network that undermines hierarchical protocols of command-and-control at every turn. Coming up on resource limits and ecological decay, the shift occurs because it must. But there is important work to be done in reifying this national shift bi-directionally: in connecting it to broader currents about the role of humanity, and in translating new conceptual understanding into new strategic, doctrinal, and tactical approaches to homeland defense and security.

D. RECONCEPTUALIZING REALITY

In Latour’s analysis, the dichotomy between nature and society was essentially a modernist political construction, which served to cement human domination and reify human exceptionalism even as the latter began to slip away. The project that remains is perhaps not to predict but to plan the future and prepare for a reassembly of the social. Perhaps the real hubris lies in exercising increasing control over the world around us while denying that it is a part of us, that we are a part of it, and that we have any say in its future. For one

thing, the security threats of the future will defy the very epistemologies we use to make sense of the world. Technological realms including cyberspace, genetic engineering, and 3D printing threaten not only the discursive categories on which our systems are built, but promise to further complicate the security atmosphere. In a global system that is, as Redclift puts it, “in effect, increasingly extra-territorial,” questions of security are increasingly relevant to our relationship to nature.¹¹¹

Hybrid phenomena including climate change, lab-grown meat, 3D printed bioweapons, artificial intelligence, and antibiotic resistance (issues in which the material is impossible to separate from the socially constructed) will continue to challenge the nature/culture divide and demand a new vocabulary—indeed a new narrative—from our security architecture. Even traditional security problems are now understood to require a new approach; military intervention cannot be expected to effectively address narrative dissonance (i.e., the “terrorist threat”), issues of human security resulting from resource depletion and ecological degradation, nor the threat of infectious disease. Contemporary security challenges are network problems—systems problems, in which every intervention carries the promise of complex downstream consequences. At best, contemporary military engagement (whether via troops or drones) introduces temporary order to a chaotic system; at worst, and all too frequently, military engagement creates new threats more efficiently than it dispatches existing ones.

E. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE

If not through traditional means, how can we reduce or even prevent the risk of terrorism? Though these two directives are not identical, they will both require fundamental shifts in thinking and practice. Already, defense analysts including Linton Wells and Sandra Martinez have called for dramatic updates to our security infrastructure. The mandate of prospering (not growing, but

¹¹¹ Redclift, “Sustainable Development,” 223.

prospering) in the complex contemporary national security environment demands agile organizations. In practice, this includes the deployment of sense networks to develop early warning systems, the development of public-private partnerships committed to intelligent information sharing, and investment in “enlightened leadership” able to face uncertainty and complexity with reasoned judgment.¹¹²

At a macro level, these changes will require a systemic reprogramming away from the organizational worldview of a hierarchy, toward the worldview of an ecosystem. It is not a closed system but an open system. In this system, the more we operate from the top, the more vulnerable we are from the bottom. The more we promote a unified multilateral process of globalization (and, in practice, Westernization), the more separatist elements will resist. Whereas a precarious balance of powers characterized the Cold War, the current era is predicated on asymmetry.

While the idea of states sending armies to face each other across a battlefield already seems as outdated as the use of bayonets (the latter are now available to the police, as it happens, via the aforementioned program to provide Pentagon excess to municipal law enforcement),¹¹³ extant drivers of conflict must still find an outlet in the world. Whether they be state-supported (proxy groups) or self-funded via crime networks and the drug trade, insurgents across the world are finding it easier to network, self-organize, and gain access to weapons and vital information via the Internet. According to military analyst John Robb, global guerillas have adopted the open-source community network model, an organizational structure that could easily be borrowed from the software industry.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Transformation Chairs Network. “Challenges for National Security Organizations and Leadership Development: Trends and Shocks in Complex Adaptive Systems,” in *Fighting Chance: Global Trends and Shocks in the National Security Environment*, edited by Neyla Arnas (Washington: NDU Press, 2009), 259.

¹¹³ Matt Apuzzo, “After Citizen Unrest.”

¹¹⁴ John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2007), 93.

In drawing a parallel between the current “organizational race” to build networks and the arms race during the Cold War era, military analyst John Arquilla is very specific about the strategic and tactical need to craft a comprehensive information strategy:

The good information strategist must be the master of a whole host of skills: understanding the kind of knowledge that needs to be created; managing and properly distributing one’s own information flows while disrupting the enemy’s; crafting persuasive messages that shore up the will of one’s own people while demoralizing one’s opponents; and, of course, deceiving the enemy at the right time, in the right way.¹¹⁵

As implied by this complex mandate, the task of securing and defending the homeland has more to do with crafting a compelling—and competitive—narrative than it has to do with the surveillance, laws, and protocols of the security state. And though current President Barack Obama, for his part, understands the importance of careful rhetoric and a consistent narrative, federal efforts at narrative cohesion have been piecemeal; for one thing, the government lacks the necessary infrastructure to practice public diplomacy comprehensively.¹¹⁶ A whole-of-government approach to information strategy, narrative, and national security would require a coordinated effort in at least four levels of directionality: from the top, from the bottom, at the community level, and from the edge.

As also emphasized by the Mr. Y narrative, the official White House 2010 National Security Strategy recognizes the importance of American innovation and leadership in promoting a secure and prosperous state.¹¹⁷ However, this is worth closer analysis, as the meaning of innovation and leadership has shifted in subtle but important ways. Leadership in complexity demands the ability to persuade

¹¹⁵ John Arquilla, “Thinking about information strategy,” in *Information Strategy and Warfare*, edited by J. Arquilla and D.A. Borer (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

¹¹⁶ Carnes Lord, “Reorganizing for public diplomacy,” in *Information Strategy and Warfare*, edited by J. Arquilla and D.A. Borer (New York: Routledge, 2007), 113.

¹¹⁷ The White House, *National Security Strategy*, Executive Office of the President (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 28.

rather than coerce and listen rather than command. Meanwhile, largely driven by the Internet, the information revolution has encouraged changes in the structures and identities of organizations and institutions, such that innovation often means harvesting from the “edge.” Failure to consistently harvest ideas from the fringes of the system leaves the center open to disruption, as the central structures of a system are focused on maintaining equilibrium—the status quo.

An advantage of networks (as opposed to hierarchies or other forms of system organization) is that they have the agility to harvest from the edge. In seeking to explain the emergence of order in chaotic systems, complex adaptive systems theory points to the edge of chaos as representative of a desirable dynamic stability. This is where real innovation occurs and social progress emerges. Far from bristling at change, systems at the edge thrive on novelty and disequilibrium (ubiquitous challenges to any governance structure). Perhaps by leveraging new information technologies to reinvigorate the democratic process, the U.S. system of governance could begin to operate closer to the edge, where systems are much more resilient to stochastic events.¹¹⁸ Enabling citizens to participate in their own governance and security—giving them reigns to the not just the narrative but the practice of democracy—will build trust and ownership, potentially reinvigorating social capital and ultimately reducing security risk by emphasizing common interest over divisive themes. Regardless of the technological platform or tool, a renewed partnership between the American people and their government is the type of synergy necessary to create an emergence of more secure and resilient systems.

As evidenced by the successes of phenomena including the open data movement at the Department of Health and Human Services and the incentive prize authority developed for federal agencies by the America COMPETES Act, many problems are often best solved through collaborative methods, even by

¹¹⁸ Transformation Chairs Network, “Challenges for National Security Organizations and Leadership Development: Trends and Shocks in Complex Adaptive Systems,” in *Fighting Chance: Global Trends and Shocks in the National Security Environment*, edited by Neyla Arnas. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2009), 259-273.

crowdsourcing (inviting the public to participate in formalized problem solving).¹¹⁹ “Swarm intelligence,” an emergent self-organizing collaborative process in complex adaptive systems that also allows bees to hive and ants to colonize, is increasingly seen as a valuable tool in both security promotion and disaster-relief scenarios. With even greater promise for the future, the ubiquity of “smart phone” technology and mobile platforms in general hold great promise for the success of any effort to streamline the intelligence of crowds into actionable security information. It is even possible that as long as the surveillance state persists, citizens would prefer to take a more cooperative role in its functions, providing a check on its power through sousveillance and transparency. This vision of cooperation between citizens and government is not fantastical, but it will require the development of an information architecture that can span stove-piped agencies and levels of government.

At the community level, it appears that security and defense systems should be networked but nodular. In analyzing our engagements abroad under the umbrella of the War on Terror, John Robb has pointed to a rise in systems disruption by non-state actors, a doctrinal shift away from sensationalist terror attacks, toward economically costly but less provocative disruptive attacks on infrastructure and systems. And while the trend has been seen abroad, any threat of “homegrown extremism” makes Robb’s prescriptions for more resilient systems especially relevant to the practice of national security.¹²⁰

Robb prescribes decentralization of government, finance, and security infrastructure. Our best bet, according to Robb, is the construction of “resilient networked communities” able to react, respond, and perhaps even anticipate systems disruptions that would cripple a hierarchical system. Decentralization has found success in security endeavors elsewhere: in Iraq, the shift away from highly visible and isolated FOBs toward platoon-size outposts with partnership

¹¹⁹ The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, *Implementation of Federal Prize Authority: Fiscal Year 2013 Progress Report*, Executive Office of the President (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, May 2014), 7.

¹²⁰ John Robb, *Brave New War*, 93.

attitudes toward local tribes and communities had a huge impact in limiting the insurgency there.¹²¹

¹²¹ Niel Smith and Sean MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point," *Military Review* March-April 2008, 43.

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